



Education & Cultural Services

Policy: Transport to and from School – Special Needs

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Last Updated: December 2015

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1. Background and Statutory Position

- 1.1 Education authorities have a statutory responsibility to provide and finance the transport of school pupils who live specified distances from school. The statutory qualifying distance for pupils of school age under eight is two miles and for those eight years and over is three miles.
- 1.2 West Lothian Council has agreed to provide free transport for all secondary pupils living more than 2 miles from their designated school and for all primary pupils living more than 1.5 miles from their designated school (from 22 June 1999). This includes travel for pupils with special needs integrated in mainstream schools.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 Home to school travel arrangements for West Lothian pupils with special educational needs attending special schools and classes will be made and paid for by the Public Transport Department.
- 2.2 Pupils eligible may have one or more of the following special needs:
 - . • moderate or severe learning difficulties
 - . • physical disabilities
 - . • emotional and behavioural difficulties
 - . • sensory impairment
 - . • medical needs

In each case, placement at a special school or class will have been agreed through the appropriate Professional Assessment Group procedures.

- 2.3 Criteria for the provision of travel to pupils attending special schools and classes are the same as for mainstream schools with the additional criterion of “need” caused by learning or physical difficulty.
- 2.4 Authorities have, in addition to the duty to provide transport on distance criteria, a responsibility to consider the travel needs of pupils for whom suitable education can best be provided at a particular school. This will not necessarily be a local school and, currently, children with special educational needs often, but not always, require to travel out of their catchment area.

3. Equality

- 3.1 In all decisions, the ability and age of the child will be considered along with any other factor which may be relevant in order to ensure equality of access to education provision.

4. General

- 4.1 Travel arrangements for pupils attending special schools and classes take account of the wide range of pupils’ individual needs. These include the child’s age, physical condition and the length of the journey and may take the form of a travel pass for a bus or train or provision of a taxi or minibus, which will be wheelchair accessible if necessary. The prime concern is to make efficient, safe, responsive and high quality provision available to those who need it.
- 4.2 In determining individual needs, recommendations from the Psychological Service, Community Child Health Service and Head Teacher will be observed and information from parents is highly desirable. Factors affecting decisions on the type of travel employed are:
 - . • distance
 - . • ability for independent travel
 - . • public transport availability
 - . • parental wishes
 - . • journey duration
 - . • physical and psychological capabilities
 - . • requirement for supervision

5. Requests for the Arrangement of Travel

- 5.1 Travel arrangements are made exclusively by the Public Transport Department.
- 5.2 Requests may be made by parents, the school, social worker or educational

psychologist. In each case, however, confirmation is needed from the Learning Support Manager or Pupil Support Manager of the placement of the pupil, of their individual needs and of the Council's responsibility to fund them. Pupils resident in other Council areas must be funded by that Council. An application form for free home to school travel can be downloaded by clicking on the link at the end of this document.

6. Award of Free Travel

- 6.1 Free travel is usually awarded on grounds of distance, i.e.: the pupil is required to attend a school more than a specified safe walking distance from home (2 miles for secondary pupils and 1.5 miles for primary pupils - from August 1999). Where the safe walking distance is less than the specified distance, free travel will not be awarded if the pupil is capable of walking to school with a responsible adult.
- 6.2 Where free travel is awarded, a travel pass allowing access public services will be issued unless this is unsuitable for a pupil's needs . In such cases contract travel by taxi, minibus or coach, which will be wheelchair accessible if necessary, will be arranged.
- 6.3 If a taxi or minibus is required, the Public Transport Department will notify the parent/carer of the contractor who will provide the vehicle, driver and an escort, if appropriate, and of the date that the service will commence.
- 6.4 The contractor's staff will contact the parent/carer to introduce themselves and to confirm the pick-up and drop-off times.
- 6.5 The Public Transport Department should be notified if a child has any special requirements. The contractor will be informed of these to ensure that the needs of the child can be met.
- 6.6 Exceptionally, a motor vehicle mileage allowance may be paid to a parent who transports their child if the Council is unable to provide a suitable and more cost effective alternative.

7. Contract Transport Arrangements

- 7.1 For pupils to whom contract transport is provided, emphasis is placed on their safety, sensitive care and comfort.
- 7.2 All contractors used are approved by the Public Transport Department and their vehicles are appropriately licensed and insured. Drivers, too, are licensed and the Council has a programme of Disclosure Scotland/PVG vetting. Drivers of licensed taxis are already vetted in the licensing process. Drivers must carry an Identification Card issued by the Public Transport Department.
- 7.3 In accordance with Council Standing Orders, transport contracts are awarded on the basis of competitive tender with the reservation of rights to recognise quality of service and continuity of staff where necessary. Tendering is also liable to EC regulation. Conditions of contract are attached at **Appendix 1**.

- 7.4 Operators must ensure that their vehicles are roadworthy at all times and vehicles are required to have basic safety features including, as appropriate:
- . • forward facing seats for all passengers
 - . • three-point seat belts fitted and used
 - . • first-aid kit
 - . • fire extinguisher
 - . • on-board communication such as radio or mobile telephone contact
 - . • 50mph speed limit
 - . • tail-lift
 - . • wheelchair utility
 - . • harnesses
 - . • booster or child seats
- 7.5 Current legislation regarding the safe conveyance of wheelchair users will be enforced.
- 7.6 Transport must arrive at the school not more than 10 minutes and not less than 5 minutes before commencement of the school day and must arrive at the school before dismissal time at the end of the day. Departure should be 10 minutes after the official closure time.
- 7.7 As a condition of contract:
- . • drivers and escorts must hold a current the Public Transport Department Special Education Needs Transport Training Certificate. In the case of minibus drivers, a Minibus Drivers Awareness Scheme (MIDAS) Certificate of Competence will be accepted.
 - . • Certificates for drivers and escorts are valid for a four year period after which refresher training is required.
 - . • In-service training is provided for escorts each school session to improve the service provided to children. This is mandatory.

8. Use Of Escorts

- 8.1 Escorts are generally but not invariably arranged to look after pupils travelling by contract transport. Where transport is provided to a secondary pupil solely on grounds of distance, no escort may be required.
- 8.2 Escorts are employed and managed by contractors and not by the Council. The Council arranges vetting of prospective escorts by Disclosure Scotland. Escorts must carry a Photo Identification Card issued by The Public Transport Department which also shows their training Certificate number and Disclosure Scotland number.
- 8.3 Conditions of contract govern the escorts' role and include a requirement to undertake annual formal training delivered by the Council - see paragraph 6.7 above.
- 8.4 Guidelines for drivers and escorts underline and expand upon their contractual

responsibilities and are attached at **Appendix 2**.

- 8.5 The duty of care of pupils assumed by the Authority in its provision of a transport service and subsequently delegated to contractors for the duration of journeys, means that pupils must be supervised at all times. With few exceptions, parents are expected to be at home after school to relieve transport staff of that duty.
- 8.6 When a parent or carer is absent, transport staff are required to inform the Public Transport Department immediately and continue to supervise the pupil until Community & Support Services arranges a carer or placement, or the parent attends. The Public Transport Department will liaise with Community & Support Services Social Work Emergency Team regarding provision of an emergency placement for the pupil.
- 8.7 Parental requests to contractors and their staff for ad hoc or unofficial changes to uplift and drop-off arrangements are unacceptable.

9. Administration of Medication

- 9.1 Medication cannot be administered by transport staff under any circumstances unless they have been fully trained and authorised by the Public Transport Department to do so in respect of specific individual pupils. Very few escorts are in this position and are responsible for fragile pupils.
- 9.2 Untrained staff are instructed to call the emergency services (Tel: 999) for medical help in the event of any emergency and, depending on their proximity and at their discretion in light of the situation, to divert to the Accident & Emergency Unit of St John's Hospital or to the school or home. Other accident and emergency units may be appropriate to some routes.
- 9.3 It is essential for transport staff to know of any medical condition that may adversely affect a pupil during a journey. Some children, for example, are liable to fits or seizures which, if prolonged and untreated may lead to serious injury.
- 9.4 Staff cannot be expected to deal as effectively with the unknown as they would if adequately briefed. If "medical confidence" requires parental permission for transport staff to be informed, then this may be a condition on which transport is provided.

10. Monitoring And Improving Performance

- 10.1 The effective operation of contract transport can best be achieved by a partnership between the Public Transport Department, drivers and escorts, school staff and parents. The following strategies have been implemented with this in view:
 - 10.1.1 The Public Transport Department has a programme of monitoring the conduct of contract journeys to ensure compliance with the terms and conditions of contract.
 - 10.1.2 In addition to safety and comfort, drivers and escorts are encouraged to make the

daily journeys of pupils constructive and enjoyable and to establish a professional rapport with parents as well as pupils.

10.1.3 Specific guidelines for drivers and escorts arriving and departing in relation to a school's particular environmental and organisational features are provided by special schools.

10.1.4 Schools and parents will be asked to complete report forms in respect of minor complaints and observations. Serious faults must be reported to The Public Transport Department immediately.

10.1.5 The views of parents with regard to ways in which their children can be helped by transport staff are welcomed.

The following documents can be downloaded by clicking on the relevant link -

[**Application Form**](#)

[**Appendix 1 – Conditions of Contract**](#)

[**Appendix 2 – Guidelines for Drivers and Escorts**](#)